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THE  
**LIBRARY ASSISTANT**

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The Official Journal  
of the Association of  
Assistant Librarians

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# THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE  
ASSOCIATION OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS  
(Section of the Library Association)

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HON. EDITOR: W. B. STEVENSON

Hornsey Public Libraries


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## Announcements

THE Hon. Education Secretary requests members to send him news of any assistants who are prisoners of war, together with their addresses. The A.A.L. Council hopes to get in touch with these men, and has already sent gifts of cigarettes to a number of them.



The usual "post-mortem" on the May examinations, due for publication this month, has lost much point owing to the speedy publication of the results. Articles on the Elementary and Intermediate examinations had been written by Messrs. Walford and Saunders. The Editor is prepared to send duplicated versions of the articles to students requiring them. Applications should be sent to the Editor, stating the section required and enclosing a stamped addressed envelope.



## CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

### COURSES, SUBJECTS, AND FEES

Courses, in all sections, are arranged to run from November to December of the following year. The subjects treated, and the respective fees for each section, are as set out below :

*Elementary Section.*—The Course covers the whole of the Library Association requirements for this section. Fee, £1 13s.

*Intermediate Section.*—Part 1, Library Classification. Part 2, Library Cataloguing. Total inclusive fee, £2 5s. Either section may, however, be taken separately for a fee of £1 6s. 6d.

## The Library Assistant

*Final Section.*—Part 1, English Literary History. Fee, £1 13s. Part 2, Bibliography and Book Selection and Historical Bibliography. Fee, £2 3s. 6d. Part 3, Advance Library Administration, including either of the specialized alternatives. Fee, £2 3s. 6d.

Non-members of the Library Association are charged double fees.

Students wishing to enter for any Course must obtain an application form from, and return it, together with the necessary fee, to, Mr. S. W. Martin, Carnegie Library, Herne Hill Road, London, S.E.24. Applications must reach the above before 20th October for the November course. AFTER THIS DATE NO APPLICATIONS WILL BE CONSIDERED.

*North-western Polytechnic, Prince of Wales Road, London, N.W.5.*—Classes for the Elementary and Intermediate Examination will be continued during session 1942-43 and will meet as follows :—*Elementary Course* (Commencing 2nd September), Literary History, Wed. 2.30-4. Miss A. D. Nash; Library Administration, Classification, and Cataloguing, Wed. 4-5.30. Miss E. Jowett. *Intermediate Course* (Commencing 16th September), Classification, Wed. 2.30-4. S. G. Saunders; Cataloguing, Wed. 4-5.30. L. M. Harrod.

*Spring Grove Polytechnic.*—The School of Librarianship will re-open on Wednesday, 16th September, 1942. The Examinations covered are the Elementary and Intermediate and each Course will consist of approximately 26 lessons. The days and times are as follows :—*Elementary*, Wed. 2-6 p.m. *Intermediate*, Classification, Fri. 2-3.30 p.m.; Cataloguing, Fri. 4-5.30 p.m. Students may enrol on the opening day of the Course. Fee for each Course, 15s. Providing a sufficient number of students enrol a Course of 10 lessons in Book Selection will be arranged. Enquiries to Mr. H. Groom, F.L.A., Public Library, Hounslow.

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### Happy Returns?

Lewis Halsey

**A**PRÈS la guerre finie.—If I were Old Moore or Nostradamus I might be able to answer the question which faces every serviceman librarian, "What is it going to be like after the war?" Not being clairvoyant, I can only admit I don't know; but several important considerations have been in my mind for some time, and have led to a suggestion that may be worth making.

*Old Skills for New.*—Our first reaction on returning to work may well be a sense of inadequacy, because the skills we have acquired in the Forces—laying guns, flying aeroplanes, handling sensitive and malevolent mechanisms as to the manner born—these skills will have blunted to an extent our professional technique. For instance, we will have lost the daily intimate contact with books, the habitual use of the tools of our trade. We will lack knowledge of people's reading needs. More particularly, having been out of touch with the public during the stress-period, we will be the less able to gauge the needs arising from their readjustment to normal living. It would perhaps go some way towards balancing this loss of touch if at the end of the war a complete bibliographical guide were produced (possibly on the lines of Tom Harrison's recent article in *Horizon*) to books published since 1939, compiled by librarians for librarians and showing the fluctuations in readers' needs and demands during the war.

*Alms and the Man.*—From the material point of view, it strikes me that when the strangeness of civilian life has worn off, we may feel a sense of personal injustice. There is the danger that we may feel that we have been given a raw deal. We will be older by who knows how many years than we were when we went away. And we shall return, presumably, to our meagre salaries to live as best we can in a world of enhanced prices and unstable markets. Professionally, some of us may find ourselves ousted, despite promises. A new world—with a vengeance. We may be in for a tough time.

*Diagnosis.*—One turns to other questions. How, for instance, is the L.A. going to deal with the problem of the half-qualified ex-serviceman or woman? The Association cannot reasonably give diplomas away; equally it cannot reasonably expect men and women to sit the ordinary examinations at the comparatively advanced ages they may be by then. Or can they? We want to know. We want an official decision: if possible, a plan. For my part, I fancy the returned library workers will

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have far too many real-life things to do to be able to enter extensively for the academic stakes. At least, I hope so !

*Prescription.*—And here I want to make a suggestion. The Army carries out a good deal of its most successful training by means of short intensive courses at Army Schools, etc., which conclude with a test on the results of which candidates are graded. The suggestion I want to make is that a similar system be adopted for completing the training of those library workers whose studies were interrupted by the war. The L.A. and the London School of Librarianship could between them certainly work out a syllabus and probably fix a venue. Who would finance the scheme ? I prefer not to try to answer that: although the municipal bodies by whom candidates were employed might be willing to subscribe. Even the Government . . . but I prefer to leave this part of my problem alone !

It should be pointed out that I am not suggesting a free and easy "Summer School" type, of course, but three months or more of hard work, and a test sufficiently stringent that a high grade in it might be accepted as equivalent to the L.A. Diploma. If the L.A. were unwilling actually to register successful candidates as Fellows, then it is suggested a high grade on the course examination plus a written thesis might be made the condition of election to Fellowship.

*Unity the Trump Card.*—Very well, then. I present this outline of an idea to the discussion of my colleagues and readers. It does strike me that those of us in the Forces would feel happier about the future if we had more evidence that a fighting body existed which could adequately press our claims. The L.A. and N.A.L.G.O. can go a long way to do that: and it is up to us to ensure that they do. That they would be maximally effective within the framework of the T.U.C. is an opinion that I ask everyone seriously to consider. Unity is itself a weapon: total unity would be practically invincible.

*Prospect.*—So the serviceman's position will be this: despite his enormous immaterial gains (which I insist on) he may come back to black-coated poverty in an all but voiceless profession. He would like to be reassured now that that will be impossible, and that he will return to an honest job of work honestly paid, and be none the less secure for having served his country. After the last war they said

*"At the going down of the sun and in the morning  
We will remember them . . ."*

which was charming. But memories did prove rather fickle, did they not ? We must make it harder for them to get away with the memorial-poppies-medals confidence trick this time.

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### Librarian and Bookseller

R. L. W. Collison

THE recent misfortunes of a well-known review bookseller cause one to reflect on the relationship between librarian and bookseller. At one time few libraries were able to buy more than a handful of books a year: to-day most provincial and many London bookshops are able to reckon on a steady source of income from their local libraries. The influence of the library upon the bookshop is growing as income for book purchase increases and is helping to make the bookseller more independent of the "fancy goods" trade with which he bastions the seasonal sale of books to private individuals. But in addition to this type of bookseller there are other kinds, some of whom are unknown to the general public.

Of those booksellers trading in new books may be discriminated three kinds: the bookseller-cum-fancy goods already mentioned; the bookselling departments of universal stores; and the bookseller who is chiefly concerned with the sale of newspapers and periodicals. Variations on each may be found here and there: together they represent the library's main sources of supply. The average provincial bookseller ekes out a somewhat precarious living with the sale of notepaper, Christmas cards, hand-bags and leatherwork, souvenirs and knickknacks. Until recently the latter were his main source of income and occupied a large proportion of the shop space. The sale of text-books to local schools will always remain a large item in his finances and sometimes a curb-side kiosk brings a tolerable profit from the sale of newspapers. Very often the owner is an influential man in the town, a councillor or a member of the local Chamber of Commerce, respected for his slight or considerable erudition, his business-like appearance, or his scholarly and picturesque untidiness. His claim to a share in the book-sales to local libraries is certain to receive a sympathetic hearing: a report on his inefficient or slack supply will rarely carry much weight among his fellow-citizens. Some of these booksellers have been of great benefit to both town and librarian; others have proved a hindrance to the work of the library.

Should the bookseller have established himself firmly in the Library Committee's estimation as deserving a share in the expenditure of the town, his subsequent neglect of the library's interests may only very slowly—or perhaps not at all—impair his reputation in their eyes. On the other hand, should his efficiency tempt the librarian to place the larger amount of orders in his hands, another bookseller in the town is sure to lodge a complaint of "unfairness" and "favouritism." In one

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ancient city the less able bookseller was known to inspect regularly books on the New Additions shelves to ascertain whether his rival was supplying a greater number of books. Moreover, local independent booksellers will often prevail on the Library Committee, by means of representation through friendly or time-serving councillors, to forbid the purchase of books from large combines or outside booksellers. Provincial conditions such as these are also to be found in some of London's suburbs where the petty and incessant fight for a larger share of the library's income continues without respite year after year, each librarian handing to his successor unwritten words of wisdom about "old so-and-so" and "that — bookseller." No text-book and no official examination deals with this uncharted but important problem in the librarian's life: the changing waters of public interference in public administration have often wrecked well-intentioned efforts made without due consideration of local factors. The branch of some national or semi-national newsagent and bookseller may often be ignored by the Library Committee which is suspicious of multiple stores and jealous of the rights of the small trader. Thus it has been known for a library to purchase a large number of periodicals and newspapers from a newsagent who lived over a mile away and possessed no telephone, rather than deal with a branch of one of the big railway booksellers which lay across the road, it being considered inadvisable to place the contract with outside firms. In a similar fashion the speedier book-supply and better service which such shops offer must—together with the greater efficiency implied—be overlooked lest local tradesmen be roused to protest.

The small newsagent in the town who calls himself "bookseller and librarian" by virtue of a shelf of cheap love stories and a case of tattered twopenny library books is sometimes impossible to ignore. His demand for a share in the library's contract may receive sympathetic audience in the committee, and his inability to cope with orders for technical and American items, his squabbles over discount for "net" books may plague the librarian for some time before he can give the unfortunate upstart his congé.

With whatever type of bookseller the librarian has to deal, problems are innumerable: a bookseller who gives perfect book-service may be just the man to forward accounts full of mistakes and corrections, where helpful alphabetical order is not to be found and duplicates unaccountably missing. The personal relationship between librarian and bookseller is sometimes distressing or even infuriating. The entrance of the librarian into his shop will perhaps bring the bookseller in nervous affability from his hiding-place with the conviction that he must dance an uneasy attendance on the inexplicably choleric librarian. Another bookseller,

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feeling slighted at the librarian's non-appearance in his shop, will for ever be waiting outside his door with a bagful of new books for the librarian to inspect. Booksellers often have small respect for the librarian's ability to read or estimate the value of a review: the book-selection will puzzle and disturb them and their chance remarks at some local function may occasion "questions in council." There are booksellers who feel that librarians must be bribed with gifts or smutty stories, fawning or a false brusqueness. To so many of them the librarian appears as a bourgeois household god to be placated but not understood.

But not all the books which libraries buy are new: many by virtue of one or more considerations, such as being out-of-print, expensive, or rare, are purchased second-hand. The sources of supply are numerous: first, the unique booksellers of the older university cities, each unequalled in his own field, each a benefactor to his city and its colleges. Such booksellers are institutions—their methods reliable, their stocks considerable, their book-knowledge unequalled by more than one librarian in a thousand. Such booksellers often maintain public library departments to cope with the large trade developed in these quarters within recent years: their catalogues are worth keeping, their lists to be searched swiftly before all the more desirable items are snapped up, their agents to be welcomed since they rarely pester and never badger the librarian into buying what he does not want.

There are the numerous second-hand booksellers in Charing Cross Road and their counterparts in the provinces: their trade is largely with collectors and they sell little to libraries apart from items of local interest. Some of them are specialists in one or more subjects and have established some considerable trade with libraries having a similar interest, but in the main their catalogues are rarely inspected more than cursorily and seldom filed.

The remainder bookseller features largely in the life of the librarian: from his little office or by means of his expansive cheery traveller pour the lists and wrappers of books which like unwanted débutantes so often clutter what seemingly they once adorned. The possibility of a bargain tempts most people and sometimes the professional scandal and the beery smiles of the traveller betray the librarian into incautious buying. Again the idea that the librarian is to be bribed gives rise to "advantageous terms," "convenient arrangements," "post-dating," and more obvious and cruder allurements by which the bookseller hopes to net that "unspent £50" before the end of the financial year can replace it in the public purse. Able to weather the insults, the frigidity, the scowls of underlings, the traveller brings to bear with varying effect his electroplated personality on the softer, humbler resistance of the librarian

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himself, nor does he forgo the infliction of the last humiliation—the sticky “mannish” handclasp as he carelessly swings his fibre suitcases from the floor.

And lastly there is the review bookseller: a strange new, evanescence mostly to be found in London. Disdaining shopwindow trade his wares are displayed in basements, or on first floors. An armchair lies here and there, cut-glass ashtrays abound, and cups of tea are endlessly made throughout the day. At 9 a.m. his shop may yet be closed for another hour; at 9 p.m. he may be working still. On any day of the week he may suddenly close up shop and go out to buy books or take a holiday in the country. Now and again men of all kinds will come in with one or two—or perhaps a carload of new books (some not yet published) and go out with half their published price in ready cash in their pockets. No receipts are given and none asked. Sooner or later the librarians arrive with their wants lists and scan the shelves quickly, hoping to be the first for the best-sellers dotted here and there. At the back a girl divides her time between typing invoices, wrapping books, and brewing tea. Unopened parcels of books clutter the floor, books lie on top of books on the shelves. Now and then a crash tells that an unwieldy pile has at last given way. The unwary bookworm who chances to find the shop is asked a fantastic price for a worthless volume: his unwanted offer of custom is rejected. Some eminent librarians scorn the availability of review copies: others buy little else even though they may not get their exact requirements. The review bookseller is often an independent, genial but brusque personality with little time for niceties—he may survive for years, or last but a few months. In most cases his book-knowledge is vast, his contacts with the publishing trade extensive.

Such are the men and the shops which claim a large amount of the time of librarians everywhere unless they be the kind who prefer to buy *ex-libris* copies from one of the great department stores where business men sell multiple copies with the same understanding they would require if they dealt in cheese or sugar. After the war, conditions will undoubtedly be changed, but it seems certain that the problem of the bookseller and his individuality will still remain to the fore.

### The County Scene

Mary Piggott

MR. CROUCH, who has had to relinquish contributing these articles while on military service, wrote recently asking for book lists as he was "on the fringe of Army Education and had the chance now and again to do some library work in the way of recommending books for unit libraries, etc.," and suggested that county library assistance to H.M. Forces was a subject which needed ventilation. The local library, he says, generally tries to give a good impression to a visiting librarian, and his own library keeps him well supplied so he cannot give the point of view of the layman in the Forces. It is possible, however, to find out what some libraries have done in the matter.

Library service to the forces must assume many forms owing to the diversity of units for whom it caters, and it is complicated by the suddenness and secrecy with which they are here to-day and gone to-morrow, not infrequently taking their library books with them. Durham County has issued a *Memorandum on the supply of books to members of H.M. Forces stationed in the County Library area* which records the supply of books under the following headings: *Individual borrowing, Bulk supplies, Dispersed units, Y.M.C.A., Classes and study groups, and Mobile libraries.*

Individual borrowing is allowed at all branch libraries without the usual householder's guarantee provided that the application form is stamped in the Unit's Orderly Room with the regimental stamp or countersigned by the C.O. or Adjutant. Personally I do not think any backing of an application form useful, as most defaulting borrowers are men who have been transferred unexpectedly and also the C.O.'s themselves, and to send overdue postcards to a new regimental address (if divulged) or c/o the War Office is as vain a proceeding as pursuing the Snark "with forks and with hope." In Lancashire no other formality is required when a member of the Forces wishes to join the library than the man's own signature, and I am sure that on the strength of this alone the utmost is done to return books borrowed. At my own branch I recently received a parcel marked "Library books for return to England" containing books taken out eight months previously!

Considering local centres the Durham Memorandum says: "In certain places . . . voluntary workers have welcomed and enrolled soldiers as individual borrowers, but in most places troops have been refused books." This is understandable in the present condition of centres. Troops have, however, been catered for by loans in bulk made from headquarters, and the units are treated like a village library with the

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same rules for safe storage of the books, responsibility for their charge and return, and the same liability for compensation for damage and loss, as well as the usual facilities for exchange of stock. Commenting on this item, Mr. Brindle, of Durham, writes: "All the camps and aerodromes in the county have, at one time or another, been supplied with books—up to 1,000 in one camp. Results have been excellent and we have had few losses. Recently units removed from five large camps in one area, and all returned the bulk of their supplies—one returning 498 out of 500. Of those outstanding the greater number were out to soldiers on courses or on leave and as the units moved suddenly those responsible were not able to contact them. The greater number of these will be returned and the rest will no doubt be paid for, judging from previous experience." He adds that the library has had trouble with only one camp, whose highly unsatisfactory education officer has now been replaced by an ex-librarian. This enlightened move on the part of the War Office will doubtless spare him further worry!

Classes and study groups are served on demand in the same manner as W.E.A. and tutorial groups.

Dispersed units (A.A. batteries and searchlight units) are presented with discarded stock, as are also the canteen and mobile libraries run by the Y.M.C.A. Mr. Brindle remarks that books for these services are "discarded somewhat earlier than usual" and prove better for casual reading than a loan collection. Attempts have been made to supply A.A. batteries and searchlight sites in the same manner as the larger camps, but this has proved a failure as "units were never in the same place two minutes together and passed on their collections to incoming units with, as you can imagine, disastrous results." The Memorandum notes this as unsatisfactory and indicates that further attempts will be made to supply dispersed units with loan collections. Kent County has at present (June) seventeen collections totalling 2,951 books on loan to A.A. batteries, so it would seem that the difficulty had been overcome here.

The success of loan collections to such units depends almost entirely on the unit education officer. Even in the hurry of departure a conscientious officer can find time for a lorry to deposit the collection at the nearest branch library. The whole service has, indeed, better opportunities for development if worked on a regional basis through the branch libraries, and where a district van is in use isolated sites can be offered a much wider choice of books than can be sent in boxes, although losses are likely to be heavy. Branch librarians are often able themselves to offer services which might never have been demanded of headquarters. If two or three soldiers are borrowing plays from a branch it is logical to tell them of the facilities for borrowing sets of plays, and the hospitality

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of the library may even be afforded them for meetings of study circles and discussion groups, as in most areas no suitable premises are at their disposal.

Miss Tilly, Librarian of the Morecambe District Branch in Lancashire, has herself run two groups. One, for R.A.F. and W.A.A.F. personnel, was held in the library, with a varied programme of talks, discussions, play readings and lantern lectures which has included a talk entitled "A doctor visits Soviet Russia" by a R.A.F. doctor, a paper on Virginia Woolf read by a member of the W.A.A.F. and a debate "That woman is more civilised than man"—a great success—and the atmosphere was entirely informal. The other group is a searchlight battery. Contact was made through the Education Corps S.M. and the site was "adopted." With one or two civilian helpers the site was visited weekly, generally for a play-reading session. Play reading proved to be the most satisfactory activity, partly because the numbers varied considerably from week to week, an "audience" could not always be counted upon, and a sudden break in the proceedings for action had not the same disrupting effect as it would have on a lecture; and partly because that form of self-expression appealed more to the men than debates or musical evenings. Miss Tilly says: "We felt that we really were doing some good because we were dealing with men who had probably never read aloud in their lives. They got to read quite well and to correct each other. We had a bit of shyness and prejudice to wear down, but soon we were welcomed and asked to 'be sure to come next week.'" Incidentally, the visitors also did the unit's mending!

Most branch librarians work in close co-operation with the local W.E.A. organiser so that no time need be lost in supplying books for the short courses which, in many instances, are all that can be arranged during a unit's limited stay in one place. Army Welfare Officers (civilians in captain's uniform) may also be of assistance, though in my experience they have proved readier to cater for corporeal needs.

It is difficult to find out how the Forces are being served throughout the country but it is probably safe to assume that libraries which in normal times are aware of the gaps in their work and try to fill them are "treating this problem as an opportunity for service"<sup>1</sup> and that the others are no more than half-hearted about it. The figures for Kent County are impressive.<sup>2</sup> A total of 189 naval, military and Air Force centres have at the moment on loan 27,606 books, of which 28 per cent. are non-fiction. The service to thirty-three of these centres, borrowing nearly

<sup>1</sup> Mr. R. Irwin, in a paper on County Libraries in Wartime, read to the L.A. at Liverpool, 4th June, 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Library review*. Summer 1942. No. 62.

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2,000 books, has been begun during the last three months so it is quite obvious that where a good service is made known by its deeds there is an enthusiastic demand for it.

It seems clear that the ordinary member of the Forces is glad to avail himself of the library service that is offered him if it does not involve too much trouble on his part, and to return borrowed books if he doesn't happen to be transferred before he thinks of it. Losses to libraries are bound to be fairly heavy, both on account of the continual "flitting" and on account also of the lessening of individual responsibility effected by the wearing of a uniform. And, if a man is posted abroad or to active service what is the relative importance of an unreturned library book compared with the implications of that?

The War Office has belatedly acknowledged the value of the work done for the Forces by the libraries and has allocated a sum of money to the various Commands to be paid to libraries in their area which *shall in the future* provide books for troops. The grant is intended to cover all losses not made good by individuals and is at the rate of £70 per 1,000 books. The Lancashire County Library has just received a cheque for £70 in return for an undertaking to make 1,000 books (in addition to the 6,000 odd already on loan) available whenever and wherever they may be required. No payment can be claimed in respect of past services, neither can books already on loan be taken into account. Why, has not been explained. Possibly the fund allocated would prove inadequate; I believe it is quite small.

## Current Books: Art and Music

AUGUST CENTENO. *The Intent of the artist.* Oxford University Press (Princeton). 15s.

**S**YMPOSIA are popular in America: this one is really worth reading, for in it Sherwood Anderson, Thornton Wilder, Roger Sessions, and William Lescaze tell us what urges them to create a story, a play, a symphony, and a building. Informative, lucid, and thought-provoking, they are four of the most articulate artists we have come across.

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MAX J. FRIEDLANDER. *On art and connoisseurship*. Bruno Cassirer. 21s.

"When last heard of, Dr. Friedlander was an emigré in Holland." Let us hope that he survives to see this fine book in English. Not only an "art expert," Friedlander is also a profound critic. His opinions are of the greatest value in the study of æsthetics, and this book of essays is a notable contribution to the subject. A finely produced volume for wartime, with excellent plates.

FRANK HOWES. *Full orchestra*. Secker & Warburg. 6s.

The music critic of *The Times* gives us one of the most excellent of all simple guides to music. In less than two hundred pages he describes the development of the orchestra and the growth of symphonic form; outlines the history of music, and sums up the fine points of playing and conducting. Terse, witty, simple, yet never condescending, this is a remarkable book.

WILLIAM JOHNSTONE. *Child art to man art*. Macmillan. 7s. 6d.

Those who read the author's *Creative art on England* will realize that his opinions on the teaching of art are bound to be stimulating. And they are—the specimens of the work of Johnstone's pupils are proof of the excellence of his methods. From scribble to the foundations of design and composition, the pupils are led gradually to produce real works of art; and each stage of development is satisfying. The illustrations deserve the closest study; a book that is a challenge to dreary academicism and a creative guide for old as well as young.

ERIC KENNINGTON. *Drawing the R.A.F.* Oxford University Press. 12s. 6d.

No one who has visited the National Gallery's exhibitions of war-time paintings can have missed Kennington's vivid pastel and chalk portraits. Here are some of them in beautiful reproduction with a fine article of appreciation by Sir Ronald Storrs. A book to buy and cherish, for Kennington's unique art will outlast many wars.

DAVID LOW. *British cartoonists*. Collins (Britain in pictures). 5s.

No better authority could have been chosen to write this excellent addition to a fine series. Low is an entertaining and concise art historian; he knows his subject thoroughly and has chosen his illustrations with care. A good five-shilling's worth.

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SYDNEY NORTHCOTE. *The Ballad in music.* Oxford University Press. 7s. 6d.

An incredibly learned and authoritative treatment of the subject, ably written. A short history of the ballad as poetry leads to a most complete chronological description of ballad settings by musicians, a discourse on vocalism, and a passing glance at the drawing-room ballad. A bibliography and a list of gramophone records is included.

TOMMY THOMPSON. *The A B C of our alphabet.* Studio. 8s. 6d.

From cave drawings to Gill Sans, Thompson describes in 64 pages of good writing and superb typography the history of the alphabet. There can be few books on the subject more entertaining and instructive than this; the red and black pages are a delight to the eye and a stimulus to the mind.

HENDRIK WILLIAM VAN LOON. *The Life and times of Johann Sebastian Bach.* Harrap. 6s.

An amusing, undignified, endearing portrait of Bach the man, written in Van Loon's familiar style illustrated by his unique scribbly drawings. This is a book for everyman that may shock the staid musicians, but it is informative—and above all—entertaining.



## Correspondence

CENTRAL LIBRARY,  
SHEFFIELD, 1.

THE EDITOR,  
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

SIR,—

The National Central Library has recently circularized libraries, at the request of certain Government departments, about the loan of foreign directories to the Government and a scheme for introducing more American books in Public Libraries. It would have been more appropriate if these two matters had been submitted to the representative body of librarianship, instead of to an organization established for quite different and clearly defined purposes.

## The Library Assistant

All librarians will have felt some disquiet about the lack of prestige and influence of the Library Association, as shown by its treatment over the reservation of librarians by the Ministry of Labour and the Board of Education. This added slight would suggest that the Government departments concerned apparently are either unaware of the existence of the Library Association, or have chosen to ignore it. This is a most serious reflection on the profession as a whole, and should not go unchallenged.

It is clear that a new attempt must be made to enhance the small prestige of librarianship. Here is an opportunity. Has the Library Association done anything about it, or is it likely to do so? Is it, on the other hand, prepared to allow functions which properly belong to it to be performed by an institution in membership?

Yours faithfully,

J. P. LAMB.

THE EDITOR,

THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

SIR,—

A phrase in Mary Piggott's article "The County scene" in the May issue reflects the ignorance common among the British people, not excepting librarians, about our ally, the U.S.S.R. She writes, of a book-list on Soviet Russia, "The case for Leon Trotsky follows *Stalin's Kampf* with nice impartiality." May I point out that *Stalin's Kampf* contains Stalin's words torn from their context and made to represent in many cases the opposite of what he actually said; the aim of the compiler being in no way friendly to the U.S.S.R., but quite the contrary.

A recent letter in the *News Chronicle* complained that the local public library was displaying books on the U.S.S.R., practically all of them anti-Soviet. And I have found this true of several libraries, due obviously not to a wish to sabotage the war effort, but to an ignorance among librarians when dealing with the flood of anti-Soviet literature which was poured out before June 1941 and has not entirely stopped now.

Congratulations, however, on publishing an account of Mrs. Beatrice King's talk to the Association of Children's Librarians. Could she not be induced to talk to the A.A.L. as well?

Yours faithfully,

"ANTI-FASCIST ASSISTANT."



## The Library Assistant

THE EDITOR,

THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

SIR,—

The war has created many vacancies in the library profession, especially for junior assistants, which are of a temporary nature. Some of these juniors may not be studying for the L.A. examinations and taking a real interest in the profession, but many, on the other hand, are doing so. What will happen to these assistants after the war? The men will, rightly, claim their pre-war places in the profession, and that means that the assistants who have replaced them will have to seek other employment (and new situations in libraries will be by no means available immediately).

I suggest that the Association should make provision for these assistants by either allowing them to complete their studies by correspondence courses, or, better still, by arranging classes throughout the country for them. The practical side could be accomplished by the assistant completing so many hours voluntary work (say ten hours per week) in local libraries (of course, the local authorities would have to co-operate in this respect). I feel sure that the keen assistant will not object to doing voluntary work to help obtain his (her) qualifications.

By this method, conscientious assistants with actual experience would be kept in the profession. This would be much better than allowing them to drift into other professions, while any available vacancies were filled by juniors having no experience whatsoever of librarianship.

Yours faithfully,

MARION MANSELL.

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